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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

UN: Conference on the Environment

State Department review completed

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UN



CONFERENCE On The
ENVIRONMENT





The UN-sponsored Conference on the Human Environment is scheduled to open in Stockholm on 5 June. The 12-day meeting is unlikely to produce agreements or to institute controls that will deal effectively with the world's environmental problems. But it may take some hesitant first steps in that direction. The conference should, for example, bring home the point that environmental protection is going to require multilateral and global cooperation. It will promote greater exchange of information, and it should help convince doubters that international action to preserve the environment is a matter of some urgency. The conference will also bring out the main obstacles to such cooperation—principally, the disparate concerns of the developed and less-developed countries, and the absence of a consensus on the appropriate role of international organizations.

Background

Despite the widespread interest in environmental problems in the post-World War II period and the increasing recognition that these problems are not neatly contained within national boundaries, the international response has been belated and inadequate. A number of UN agencies have undertaken environmental programs, but with little over-all coordination. Only in those international organizations with a European or Atlantic orientation (NATO, OECD, etc.) has much attention been given to multi-national action. Even in those bodies, the impetus has been supplied largely by the US, which is far in the lead in its research into the nature of the problem and the extent of the threat.

In 1968, Sweden proposed a UN Conference on the Human Environment and obtained the endorsement of both the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. Planning was handed over to a 27-nation preparatory committee and a small secretariat staff headed by Maurice Strong, a Canadian who has since been designated undersecretary general for environmental affairs and secretary general of the conference. The committee and staff have planned what is expected to be the largest international conference ever held under UN auspices; over

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1,500 official representatives will be in attendance.

Procedural Difficulties and Atmospherics

During the preparatory sessions, Moscow repeatedly warned that it would not attend the conference unless East Germany were granted equal status with West Germany. These threats became more explicit last January after the General Assembly chose the so-called "Vienna formula" giving the vote at Stockholm only to members of the UN or of UN-related agencies. Bonn meets this criterion; Pankow does not.

Since the General Assembly setback, Moscow's efforts to help the East Germans get to Stockholm have reached a dead end. Moscow's hope that Pankow would gain admission to a UN-related agency before the conference collapsed last month when the Assembly of the World Health Organization again voted by a large margin to defer the East German application for membership for another year. Likewise, Moscow's efforts to obtain de facto equal status for Pankow—by eliminating all voting at the conference and operating by consensus—have foundered because the Western powers are unwilling to rely on such procedures for so important a meeting.

Unless there is a sudden change of heart in Moscow, it therefore appears that the conference will open without representation from the USSR and other Warsaw Pact countries. This will not scuttle the meeting as many had feared it might. Soviet support of multilateral undertakings is grudging even in the best of circumstances, and the USSR was not expected to contribute very much at Stockholm. Moreover, a Soviet absence now would not preclude association with the work of the conference. Moscow, indeed, signed an environmental pact with the US during the Moscow summit.

Nevertheless, Soviet absence will dilute the international commitment at Stockholm to do something about shared ecological dangers. The Swedes, who recognize the need for Soviet co-operation in checking the serious pollution



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Left: Detergents in the canals of Venice



Fish killed by pesticides in Rhine



problems of the Baltic, will particularly regret their failure to show up. In addition, those countries that regard the conference principally as another opportunity to air their complaints against the industrialized nations will have no targets now except the West. And the Chinese, who have decided to participate, will be free to play upon these anti-Western themes.

In any case, it seems likely that emotions will often run high, and perhaps even get in the way of serious business at the conference. The host government itself, for example, is expected to push for adoption of contentious language regarding the testing of weapons of mass destruction, and it is under increasing pressure to put before the conference allegations of "ecocide" associated with US military operations in South-east Asia. Sweden is also permitting a number of official and non-official environmental meetings to convene in Stockholm at the same time as the UN conference. Most of them are likely to be dominated by radical elements intent on gaining the attention of the numerous media representatives on hand. There could, as a result, be some violence in the streets of Stockholm.

The Planning to Date

Despite the procedural problems, the preparatory sessions have gone well, and a very ambitious agenda has been drawn up. It envisages that once credentials issues are resolved, work in committees will focus on six key topics:

- population growth and the quality of urban life;
- natural resources management;
- identification and control of pollutants of global significance;
- the need for international data exchanges;
- environmental implications of development programs;
- institutional arrangements required to enhance world-wide cooperative measures.

The plenary sessions will review the committees' findings. They will also adopt a declaration on the human environment. The negotiations so far on the text of this declaration strongly suggest that the conference will be more engaged with political than technical issues. Led by Brazil, many of the less-developed countries for some



Mining in Australia

Left: Dam building in Brazil

time have been suspicious that Stockholm could produce environmental controls which the industrial powers could tolerate and afford, but which would inhibit the poorer nations in exploiting their own resources. The current 23-paragraph declaration accordingly blends bland assertions on the need to upgrade national environmental programs with vague formulations calling for aid in carrying them out.

The plenary will also review an "action plan," worked out by Undersecretary General Strong's staff, which is based on some 3,300 pages of national submissions. The chief proposals in the plan call for a 100-station international network to monitor air pollution, a ten-year moratorium on commercial whaling, and an "earth-watch" to serve as an advance warning system on potentially adverse environmental effects. To put across the entire package—or even its main points—will require great effort and numerous political compromises, given the conflicting interests and the sensitivity of the sovereignty and budgetary issues involved.

To try to cope with the financial and institutional arrangements required for an effective multi-national program, the US in February proposed the creation of a voluntary UN Fund for the Environment, with a goal of \$100 million for its first five years. The idea was quickly endorsed by Undersecretary General Strong. The fund would support projects of truly global dimensions, such as the establishment of monitoring networks and the curbing of maritime pollution. Such projects would be coordinated by a special staff within the UN secretariat. No aid would be given from this fund to nations to tackle problems within their own borders.

The US had hoped for approval at Stockholm of stringent limits on the discharge of wastes by ocean-going vessels. That objective now appears no longer possible, however, in view of the failure of an ad hoc 30-nation conference at Reykjavik in April to produce the necessary agreement. All of the leading maritime states except the USSR were in Reykjavik, but agreement could not be reached because of disputes

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Earth Day in New York, April 1970.



over coverage of commercial ventures on and below the ocean floor, military activities including submarines and sonar devices, and transport through the Arctic Northwest Passage.

Some Fundamental Problems

The industrial powers that are responsible for so much of the world's pollution are—with the exception of the US—generally not yet geared up for national fact-finding efforts in many areas of environmental concern. Moreover, despite the impressive contributions made by some of these countries in the preparatory sessions, they appear reluctant to make a real commitment to the work at Stockholm. As in so many UN matters, most nations have deep misgivings about agreements that might restrict their freedom of action or might subject their activities—in this case mainly economic—to international scrutiny.

The attitude of many less-developed countries is reflected in a paper of demands recently issued by the 41-member Organization of African Unity. The vituperative language of the paper somewhat obscures the fact that the problems raised in it are central to the outcome at Stockholm. On funding, for example, the paper cites a "polluters-must-pay" principle, but goes beyond it to demand reparations from the colonial nations that long exploited African resources. The developed countries will not, of course, subscribe to this notion, and they will insist that any money that might be forthcoming be earmarked exclusively for pollution controls and not used as multilateral assistance in another guise.

The financial issue is linked to another key question: should the desire of a poor nation to get its economy moving be affected by environmental standards or guidelines applicable worldwide? Both the Brazilian draft resolution to be offered at Stockholm and the African paper stress the permanent sovereignty of states over their natural resources in a manner that is antagonistic toward the idea of imposing international rules. A Swedish alternative draft resolution, which has won considerable support among Western states, favors a go-slow approach on imposing uniform standards.

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Planners had hoped that the Stockholm proceedings would serve to encourage greater regional cooperation—especially in the Third World—in tackling environmental problems. The African paper at several points emphasizes this idea. The sensitive issue of sovereignty, however, clouds the prospect for such cooperation. Brazil, to cite one example, is not willing to consider at all the Argentine point of view regarding Brazilian plans to construct dams on the upper sections of the Parana River (which later runs through Argentina). Brazil has secured language in the Stockholm draft declaration that advocates only the sharing of information on such projects.

Population control was originally viewed by the Swedes as one of the topics most worthy of consideration. It has become apparent that, while India and several other nations are receptive, the majority has no desire to debate this issue at Stockholm. The draft declaration merely states that population policies are to be those “deemed appropriate by governments concerned” and “without prejudice to basic human rights.” Serious deliberation of the topic will probably be deferred until 1974, the World Population Year, when a World Population Conference will be held under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council.

Conclusions

In light of the preparatory sessions and the broad problem areas, prospects for definitive action at Stockholm are not promising. The declaration on the human environment is going to lack teeth, and much of the “action plan” is unlikely to be accepted at this time. Nevertheless, information will be disseminated, views will be aired, and environmental activities will as a result be treated in a more formal way by the UN in the future. Thus, Stockholm is only the first step in a lengthy sorting-out process that will again test the capacity of nations to deal with problems that require the broadest kind of international cooperation and agreement.

Maurice Strong



PROMINENT US ATTENDEES

Senator Howard Baker
 Shirley Temple Black
 Representative John Blatnik
 Senator James Buckley
 Senator Clifford Case
 Representative John Dingell
 Counselor John Ehrlichman
 Representative Seymour Halpern
 Christian Herter, Jr.
 Senator Warren Magnuson
 Representative Robert McClory
 World Bank President Robert McNamara
 Interior Secretary Rogers C.B. Morton
 Senator Frank Moss
 Senator Gaylord Nelson
 Senator Claiborne Pell
 S. Dillon Ripley
 Laurance Rockefeller
 EPA Director William Ruckelshaus
 CEQ Chairman Russell Train
 Senator Harrison Williams

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